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V CORPS SERGEANT MAJOR PROVES THAT DEDICATED WOMEN CAN FIND OPPORTUNITY IN ARMY

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GRAFENWOEHR TRAINING AREA, Germany – Many people believe that only a traditional nuclear family can survive today; that single parents and blended families will only flounder and fail.

But Sgt. Maj. Julia A.M. Giles for the munitions division of V Corps' 19th Support Center, 3rd Corps Support Command, based in Wiesbaden, Germany, is living defiance of that belief.

Giles says grew up under the guidance of a harsh father in a dysfunctional home in the small town of Pryor, just outside Billings, Mont. She became pregnant with her first child at the age of 15. Little more than a year after her daughter was born, she gave birth to a second.

"[My father] wasn't speaking to me at the time," she says. "[I thought], 'How could you throw me out with nowhere to live and nowhere to go.'" A mere teenager with



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Pfc. Lurine E. Houde (left) of the 19th Support Center of V Corps' 3rd Corps Support Command gets a battle update from Sgt. Maj. Juila A.M. Giles during V Corps' recent Victory Focus exercise at the Grafenwoehr (Germany) Training Area.

two children, she was faced with the arduous task of scratching out a life for herself and her young family.

She had to leave high school because of the negative reactions of her peers and those in authority positions. "In our society, when you get pregnant when you're young, it's like you are already doomed to not succeed ... everyone says you're not going to make it," she said.

Refusing to give up, Giles earned a General Educational Development high school graduation equivalency certificate and began a licensed practical nursing program while working as a nurse's aid in a local hospital.

She says she was on welfare and going to school, but received no emotional or other support from her family and sought a way out of the small town. Her younger brother, who had joined the Army Reserve, advised her to join the military.

"He said, 'Go ahead and go. When you get to basic training, it's just like dad yelling at you,'" she said. To Giles, this seemed the best way out of her dilemma.

She first spoke with a Marine Corps recruiter. But she says that after doing exceptionally well on the Marine entrance exams, she was turned away simply because she was a single mother.

"I cried," said Giles, "and with tears in my eyes, [the Marine recruiter] marched me down to the Army recruiting office ... and said, 'We have a young lady here with no high school diploma and kids.'"

The Army recruiter told Giles she would have to enlist in the Army Reserve, and after 12 months she could go on active duty as a prior service enlistee.

This option involved giving up her children completely. The recruiter told her to “go home and think about it, then come back,” she said.

But she says she wanted to leave her old life behind badly enough to take the recruiter up on his offer.

“I made my decision and he walked me through it,” said Giles.

She gave complete custody of her children to her aunt, but says she signed the papers in a way that would assure she would get them back. “When I think about where I came from, and what could have happened, I was determined to get out of there,” she says.

After completing her first year of service with the Army Reserve at the 592nd Ordnance Battalion in Billings, she signed the papers to join the active Army. Her first duty assignment was at Fort Hood, Texas, where she served as an ammunition specialist for the 34th Support Battalion.

At Fort Hood, she says, she established a network with Army families so that the fact that she was a single parent did not affect her job performance. She had to manage her work and take care of the children, but she kept herself prepared.

“I always had a plan,” she said.

Those plans kept her moving ahead. Giles went on to become operations NCO for the 125th Ordnance Battalion in Billings; Advance Individual Training drill sergeant at Redstone Arsenal, Ala.; first sergeant of the 65th Ordnance Company and later, the 22nd Ordnance Company, in Korea.

Over a period of 23 years of service Giles has received two Meritorious Service Medals, seven Army Commendation Medals and four Army Achievement Medals.

Giles' unit took part in V Corps' recent exercise, Victory Focus, here. As the sergeant major for the munitions division, she is in charge of the division's overall procurement, distribution and replacement of all personnel and materiel. She also says she mentors her NCOs as much as possible, drawing on her hard-won experience.

"I look back and say, 'I did it,'" she said.

"She's like a mother," said Pfc. Lurine E. Houde, an ammunitions specialist in Giles' unit. "She takes care of us."

Giles says will never forget what she went through as a young mother and she has embraced other young women who are experiencing similar challenges. "I have taken care of five young females when they were pregnant and on the street, and looked after them so they were not struggling," Giles said. "They all call me mom now."



